open wide our hearts

the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

Grade 7 Activity: Social Sin, Racism, and Our Response - The Native American Experience

Doctrinal elements:

Man's Vocation: Life in the Spirit

- The Dignity of the Human Person -- We can sin by cooperating in another's sin. Sin also has a social structure. **(CCC 1868-69)**
- The Human Community—We have a responsibility to take part in public life. **(CCC 1913-15, 1926)**

"Nor have we spent the necessary time to examine where the racist attitudes of yesterday have become a permanent part of our perceptions, practices, and policies of today, or how they have been enshrined in our social, political, and economic structures."

– *U.S. bishops,* Open Wide Our Hearts

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. Understand how sin gives rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to divine goodness. Sin has a social structure. (CCC 1869)
2. Explore two specific examples of sinful structures.
3. Reflect on how human dignity requires us work to promote the common good (CCC 1913, 1926), both in the personal sphere (CCC 1914) and in public life (CCC 1915).
4. Identify ways they can promote the common good in personal and public life.

Quotes from *Open Wide our Hearts*

- "Racism can also be institutional, where practices or traditions are upheld that treat unjustly certain groups of people."

- "The truth that we must face is straightforward. When one culture meets another, lack of awareness and understanding often leads to grossly distorted value judgments and prejudice. This prejudice fuels attitudes of superiority that are embedded in, and reinforced by, social structures and laws. This is evident in how white European immigrants and pioneers acted in their encounters with Native Americans; it is equally evident in the treatment of Africans who were enslaved and brought to the shores of America."

- "These examples from the experiences of Native, African, and Hispanic Americans demonstrate how, as a nation, we have never sufficiently contended with the impacts of overt racism. Nor have we spent the necessary time to examine where the racist attitudes of yesterday have become a permanent part of our perceptions, practices, and policies of today, or how they have been enshrined in our social, political, and economic structures. Much can be learned in hearing the stories of those who have lived through the effects of racism. In examining the generational effects of racism on families, communities, and our Church, each of us can begin to act in solidarity to change the prospects for future generations."

- "Love compels each of us to resist racism courageously. It requires us to reach out generously to the victims of this evil, to assist the conversion needed in those who still harbor racism, and to begin to change policies and structures that allow racism to persist."

- "Overcoming racism is a demand of justice, but because Christian love transcends justice, the end of racism will mean that our community will bear fruit beyond simply the fair treatment of all. After all, 'Within [the human] family,' as St. John Paul II said, 'each people preserves and expresses its own identity and enriches others with its gifts of culture' (John Paul II, Address at the Meeting with the Native Peoples of the Americas, September 14, 1987, no. 4)."

Instructions for the Lesson

As homework, have students read the handout, Racism and the Native American Experience.

Begin by introducing the concept of social sin. Explain that the personal sinful acts of many combine to the degree that they give rise to social situations and institutions which are contrary to divine goodness.

In *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love,* the Catholic bishops of the United States point to social sin when they write:

- "The truth that we must face is straightforward. When one culture meets another, lack of awareness and understanding often leads to grossly distorted value judgments and prejudice. This prejudice fuels attitudes of superiority that are embedded in, and reinforced by, social structures and laws. This is evident in how white European

immigrants and pioneers acted in their encounters with Native Americans; it is equally evident in the treatment of Africans who were enslaved and brought to the shores of America."

Ask students about what they learned from the handout on Racism and the Native American Experience (which they read as homework) using the questions below. Where homework cannot be pre-assigned, simply spend a few minutes sharing the main points of the handout with the class. Ask:

- What struck you or jumped out at you about the Native American experience?
- What injustices or wrongs did Native Americans experience following the arrival of the Europeans?
- How does the Native American experience in the U.S. illustrate the concept of social sin?

Show the video: Life as a Young Native American. Ask:

- What are some of the present-day effects of racism against Native Americans over centuries?

If possible, project the Native American Protocols of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in the front of the room. Explain that the Archdiocese of Los Angeles developed these protocols in recognition that Native Americans of California are the First People of the Land. Scroll through the document and highlight some of its key points.

Then show the video: Winds of Change. Ask:

- What ideas do these two examples (the Protocols and Winds of Change) give you for how the Church might work with Native Americans to promote racial justice?

Explain that human dignity requires us to participate in promoting the common good (CCC 1913, 1926), both in the personal sphere (CCC 1914) and in public life (CCC 1915). Ask students:

- How can you work for racial justice and the common good in the personal sphere?
- How can you work for racial justice and promote the common good in public life?

As homework, have students write about one way they can work for racial justice in the personal sphere, and one way they can do so in public life.

Copyright © 2018, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. All rights reserved. This text may be reproduced in whole or in part without alteration for nonprofit educational use, provided such reprints are not sold and include this notice. *This resource and many others are available at usccb.org/racism*.

Quote from Pope John Paul II, Address at the Meeting with the Native Peoples of the Americas, September 14, 1987, copyright © 1987, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (LEV), Vatican City. Used with permission. All rights reserved.